

women, and children who have vitiligo know the sting and emotional distress it causes. I have seen it in the eyes and heard it in the voices of those with whom I've met who have it.

I learned about vitiligo from one of my constituents, Stella Pavlides, who is the Founder and President of the American Vitiligo Research Foundation, which is headquartered in my congressional district in Clearwater, Florida. Stella is a tireless advocate who has dedicated her life to finding a cure for vitiligo and ending the hurt it causes. I have pledged to her that I will work with my House colleagues to raise public awareness about vitiligo so that we can make it a disease of the past and not the mystery illness shrouded in ignorance that it is today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our colleague, Congressman TODD TIAHRT, for taking a leading role in helping me bring this disease to the attention of our colleagues. I hope that all of our colleagues will join us in raising public awareness about vitiligo and dedicating ourselves to helping the medical and scientific communities find a cure for it.

#### HONORING VETERANS

#### HON. MIKE MCINTYRE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 6, 2003*

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the 77,000 veterans in my district who have dedicated their lives to fighting for this great country. All Americans must understand that we have a responsibility to support the men and women in uniform who risk their lives on a daily basis to protect the freedoms we enjoy. We must never forget that hundreds of millions of people in the United States and around the world sleep in peace because hundreds of thousands of Americans rest in graves all across the world—fallen heroes in the name of freedom. The price of freedom is always high, but the price of war is even higher! And no one knows that better than our Nation's veterans. As guardians of freedom, righteousness, and justice, their actions have cemented the foundation of this great Nation and helped shape the destiny of our Nation and our world. It is their continued spirit, service and sacrifice that have helped our country maintain its posture in the world, and we cannot afford to ignore the promises we made to them when they first made their promise to protect our country.

First, it's about our veterans' spirit—a spirit that has been unsurpassed. Over 48 million Americans have stepped forward to defend our land since our Nation's founding. And today, there are 25 million living veterans who have served in times of war and peace. Individuals who dared to make a difference, and people who were willing to take a stand—whether it was convenient or not! Let each of us continue to work and honor our veterans' spirit, who have proved their heroism and their love for our country—time and time again.

We must also pay tribute to our veterans' dedicated service to this country. From Lexington and Concord to Normandy and Okinawa, from Korea and Vietnam to the Persian Gulf, and from the streets of Baghdad to the mountains of Afghanistan, our veterans, mili-

tary retirees, servicemen and women have and are defending our great country at a great cost. No group of Americans deserve our admiration and respect more than those who have worn the uniform of the United States of America and fought to protect our homes, our way of life, our freedom, and our future.

Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear where I stand—on the side of our veterans! That's why I am an original cosponsor of a comprehensive veterans package. Highlights of this package include:

Under the current budget rules in Congress, veterans' benefits—the money for war service and war injuries are under mandatory spending—that means whatever the need, there has to be the resources. The money for VA hospitals and clinics falls under discretionary spending—that is a certain amount that is set aside, and if the need grows for more, then it may or may not be increased. I say that's wrong, and I am co-sponsoring legislation, the Veterans Health Care Funding Guaranteed Act, that would give veterans what they have been promised—lifelong benefits and health care. This would reduce the national disgrace that leaves 200,000 veterans waiting up to 6 months for an appointment at a Veterans Hospital. We can and must do better and my plan would reduce waiting times for first time doctor appointments to 30 days.

I support an interim disability payment of \$500 per month when claims are not expedited after remand.

I support a full repeal of the concurrent receipt issue. This inequity that prevents disabled military retirees from receiving both their pensions and disability pay is wrong. While we were able to make progress on this issue last year with a partial appeal, more needs to be done to fully repeal this, and I am working on that by signing a discharge petition to bring this bill directly to the floor of the House of Representatives so we can pass it.

I support legislation to phase out the reduction in benefits in the military Survivor Benefit Plan. The benefit to military spouses is not what enrollees were promised and the program is not providing the level of protection military survivors need and deserve.

I also support the Keep Our Promises to America's Military Act that would ensure full and adequate health coverage for all members of the uniformed services by allowing them to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program.

I support the Military Pay Equity Act that would increase the rates of military basic pay for members of the uniformed services.

I support efforts to improve the Montgomery GI Bill to ensure that higher education and training benefits are adequate.

I support legislation to allow Federal civilian and military retirees to pay health insurance premiums on a pretax basis and to allow a deduction for TRICARE supplemental premiums.

I support the Truth in Recruiting Act that would mandate that members of the Armed Forces shall be entitled to all benefits they were promised when they originally entered the service. Under this bill, each member of the Armed Forces would be given a written statement describing the benefits that will be provided to that person if he or she attains retirement status.

I support the Veteran's Right to Know Act that would require the VA to inform veterans about eligibility for benefits and health-care

services whenever a veteran first applies for any benefit with the VA. It would also help widows and survivors of veterans by informing them at the time of a burial request or application for life insurance proceeds about the full array of benefits available to them.

And recently, I submitted testimony to the VA Cares Commission urging them to expand the Fayetteville VA Medical Center, which currently operates in antiquated facilities. The proposed plan calls for an expansion of the outpatient facility and an additional 110,000 square feet. Because the Fayetteville clinic is such an important facility to veterans in North Carolina, it is important that it remains in the proposed national plan. I have also supported additional VA clinics in my district in Lumberton and Supply, as well as an expansion of the Wilmington VA clinic.

Finally, it is our veterans' sacrifice that has brought true freedoms to this nation! It is a sacrifice I have seen in the hearts and eyes of men and women in uniform around the globe with whom I have visited. It is a sacrifice that does not complain. It is a sacrifice that is respectful. It is a sacrifice that is genuine. And it is a sacrifice that we all must respect.

This is not a partisan issue. It is an American issue. And we must stand shoulder-to-shoulder and respect the spirit, service, and sacrifice of our nation's veterans. Nothing less is acceptable.

#### HEROISM FROM FIREFIGHTERS, EMERGENCY PERSONNEL AND OTHER FIRE RESPONDERS

#### HON. GARY G. MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 6, 2003*

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, the wildfires that burned across Southern California last week destroyed homes, devastated communities and left 20 dead in its wake. But from this horrific natural disaster, we witnessed heroism and determination from firefighters, emergency personnel and other first responders who put their lives on the line to save others. But we also witnessed true leadership from those directing operations and coordinating efforts from command centers scattered throughout the state.

One of these centers was located in the city of Rancho Cucamonga, which witnessed firsthand the fire's relentless march of destruction. At the helm of the city's strategic operations were Fire Chief Dennis Michael, Police Chief Pete Ortiz and City Manager Jack Lam. All three men, working closely with the mayor and city council, saved thousands of homes and protected just as many lives.

Mayor Alexander and his colleagues on the Rancho Cucamonga city council also deserve high praise for planning and preparing the city for this type of disaster. During the crisis and aftermath that followed, the residents of Rancho Cucamonga have been well served. And under their continued leadership, the community will rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, Rancho Cucamonga is a prosperous city nestled at the base of Southern California's foothill mountains. City leaders have dedicated their lives to ensure residents have a high quality of life, and because of this leadership and experience the community will recover.